Tells the Facts and Names the Names

CounterPunch

$2.50

HILLARY SLURS NEW YORK

NOVEMBER 1-15, 1999 *Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair* **VOL. 6, NO. 19**

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The American Landscape

Teaching at The Wall

BY MICHAEL YATES

Pennsylvania's Western Penitentiary, known to its residents as "The Wall," is a maximum security prison, sitting along the Ohio River on the far north side of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (USA). The spot is a pretty one, although in the fenced-in former parking lot facing the river, to which the inmates have occasional access, the fence itself is covered with plastic sheeting so that they cannot actually see the water.

I have been teaching a class in economics at this prison for two hours every Tuesday evening. I arrive a little after 6:00 P.M., sign in at the front desk, and present myself to a guard. I empty my pockets and take off my belt and shoes (if they have any metal on them). The guard checks my bag, and I walk through a metal detector.

I have a cushion with me because I cannot sit on a hard chair without pain. I had to get prior permission from the superintendent's office to bring in this cushion, and it is checked by the guard each time I arrive for class. After passing through the metal detector and back out again, I go in and am drug checked. Another guard takes a filter of some sort and puts it into a machine that looks a little like a miniature dust buster. He runs this over my palms, my jacket pockets, my pants and shirt pockets, and my pants cuffs. Then he takes out the filter and puts it into another machine that checks for any sign of a wide variety of drugs. The guard marks my hand with a marker visible to a special light. I am given an ID card with my picture on it, and I place this in a visible place on my shirt or jacket. Then another guard is called, and he comes out to escort me to the school building inside the prison. We await the opening of a set of double doors by still another guard invisible to us. The doors open and we go down a hallway to another set of doors which open into the yard of the prison. We walk a block or so through several gates to the school building, and the guard lets me into the classroom.

I await the arrival of the students. They may be late for any number of reasons; prisons have many checks on prisoners and these take time. Not all of the students may make every class. Some of them may be on various sorts of punishment. One man missed last week's class, perhaps because he rebelled when he was not allowed to go to the funeral home to see his dead mother's body. I make small talk with the guards. It is best to keep on their good side as they can make life difficult for me if they wish. If I plan to use a video or a film, I have to let them have it in advance. My friend who helps run this education program is trying to get this procedure eliminated. Before it was implemented a teacher showed the film, "The Battle of Algiers," to a class studying Frantz Fanon's Wretched of the Earth. This probably would have been prohibited had she had to show the film to the prison administrators first. Generally you can use any materials you want, but titles referring to persons such as Mumia or Leonard Peltier will probably be confiscated, if not from us then from the inmates.

I have never felt unsafe in the prison. However, I did jump the first time the

(**The Wall,** *continued on page 8*)

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Our Little Secrets

Albright's Tiny Coffins: A Sequel

Dear Alex and Jeffrey,

Per our conversation with your office this morning, I am confirming that we will send your excellent CounterPunch article on how US sanctions work to people who request information on Iraq.Below is a message I sent out to our list yesterday, regarding our polite disruption of Ms. Albright's speech last night. Without reporting such as yours, none of this would be possible. In solidarity, Nicholas Arons, for Voices in the Wilderness

11/10/99 This evening, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright spoke in Chicago at the Council on Foreign Relations. The topic of her speech: "Priorities of US Foreign Policy."

Of course, there could be no Madeleine Albright speech in Chicago lacking a Voices in the Wilderness presence. We fasted in June when she was to receive an honorary degree from Northwestern University School of Law, and this evening we were outside with signs and placards, and inside with flyers.

Just three minutes into her speech, Father Bob Bossie of the 8th Day Center for Justice rose and told the crowd of 2500, "Ms. Albright, 500,000 Iraqi children have died because of the sanctions. Is the price worth it?" He repeated this line several times as he was dragged out of the Hilton ballroom, waving a photograph of an Iraqi child who has since died from leukemia. Fifteen others, including Kathy Kelly, Karl Meyer, Paul Bossie, and Brad Simpson followed suit with similar statements, expressing our frustration with the US State Department and its cruel policies in Iraq. Five were arrested outside, in the plush Hilton lobby.

Ms. Albright was visibly perturbed, as were the conveners of this event. They repeatedly told the activists that there would be a forum later for discussion (there actually never was). They said we were rude, out of place, and disrespectful. She reasserted her support for economic sanctions, and blamed Saddam Hussein for the suffering of the Iraqi people. "I assure you that the State Department cares about Iraqi children more than Saddam Hussein," she explained. "Now let me finish my speech, please."

We did not take pride in disrupting this event, forking over $20 to listen to the Secretary of State, and we are not proud to have caused such a disturbance. But, we know of no other way to reach the hearts and minds of those who have the power to make decisions that affect so many. We cannot allow standing ovations for a person who said that the "price is worth it" when considering 500,000 young deaths. Local reporters covered the event, and portions were aired on local television and radio.

As we rudely interrupted Ms. Albright, we recalled the children we have met in Iraq, their parents, and the daily grind and pain that ensue each day because ofsanctions. 200 dying each day, at least 15 while Ms. Albright spoke. We watched a woman speak who is complicit in this madness, an insane policy of sanctions, who embodies all that we oppose in our government and its policies towards Iraq.

Some people in the audience were moved by our statements, others were shaken in many ways by our audacity and seeming impunity in the presence of venerable and consummate leaders and politicians, but all were overwhelmingly forced to consider the veracity of what Ms. Albright was saying. Many in the halls afterwards commented that while we were rude, we could be right. One person said, "You know, I oppose sanctions and I am glad someone spoke up".

Please keep Kathy, Karl, Danny, Kristin, and Brad in your thoughts and prayers, as they sit in jail tonight for speaking the truth at the Chicago Hilton, where the Secretary of State addressed the pressing question: priorities in US foreign policy.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Arons, for VitW

CounterPunchers wanting to send support to this valiant group fighting the sanctions against Iraq can contact 773-784-8065, or e-mail them at kkelly@igc.org or look at their website, www.nonviolence.org/vitw.

"We cannot allow standing ovations for a person who said that the 'price is worth it' when considering 500,000 young deaths."

Al's Poison Tongue

Back in 1989, when George Bush was trying to get his friend, the late Senator John Tower, confirmed as Secretary of Defense, Bob Woodward authored a very damaging story about Tower in the Washington Post. The story alleged that Tower, while on a jaunt to an air force base, had attempted to force his attentions on a Air Force enlisted woman.

As it turned out, the story was easily disproved by the Tower forces, who pointed out that the Senator had never visited the base in question. Woodward must have been chagrined, since he had learned the story at a discreet dinner at the Brasserie, an upmarket Capitol Hill eatery. Present had been Woodward, perma-politico Carter Eskew, and Al Gore, then a

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Published twice monthly except August, 22 issues a year:
$40 individuals,
$100 institutions,
$30 student/low-income
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Senator on the Armed Services Committee. Gore had plucked the titbit from the classified FBI 302 reports—notorious compendia of rumor — given to the committee for scrutiny and made haste to pass them on to Woodward. Of course there was no voice more indignant than that of the veep when the Republican house managers were tossing about their supposedly secret morsels about President Bill's predatory past.

HRC's Lymietown Slur

HRC should be more sensitive to her putative constituents. Discussing her adoptive state of New York at the White House recently, she remarked off-handedly that "We're moving to the Lyme Disease capital of the world". Apprised of this animadversion, West Wing staffers relaxed in the belief that the remark would remain secluded from public attention. Vain hope! The Friends of CounterPunch are everywhere.

McKinney's Sentence

Maybe the whole sinister push for hate crimes legislation will subside, now that Aaron McKinney has been put away for a couple of lifetimes, after Shepard's parents said they didn't want the state to kill him. It was bizarre to hear some liberals arguing simultaneously that: a) a perp should suffer additional punishment, up to and including death if it can be shown the perp's mind was suffused with a particular kind of hate, but that: b) it is outrageous to claim mitigation because the perp's mind was inflamed with panic at the prospect of homosexual advances. Of course someone facing the death penalty should be allowed to argue anything.

There were other disturbing features of the plea agreement, starting with the successful demand by Shepard's parents, Dennis and Judy, that neither McKinney nor any members of his defense team ever speak to the press about the trial. Indeed, the state of Wyoming effectively ceded to Shepard's parents the disposition of the penalty phase of the trial. Amid Dennis McKinney's lengthy remarks to the court (where he emphasized his belief in the death penalty) came these words addressed to McKinney:

"Your agreement to life without parole has taken yourself out of the spotlight and out of the public eye. It means no drawn out appeals process, chance of walking away free due to a technicality,

A boast that a victim's parent, not a jury, can "grant" life is not one that should be heard in any courtroom.

no chance of a lighter sentence due to a 'merciful' jury. Best of all you won't be a symbol. No years of publicity, no chance of a commutation, no nothing- just a miserable future and a more miserable end. It works for me...

"Mr. McKinney, I am not doing this because of your family. I am definitely not doing it because of the crass and unwarranted pressures put on by the religious community. If anything, that hardens my resolve to see you die. Mr. McKinney, I'm going to grant you life, as hard as it is for me to do so, because of Matthew. Every time you celebrate Christmas, a birthday or the fourth of July, remember that Matthew isn't. Every time you wake up in that prison cell, remember that you had the opportunity and the ability to stop your actions that night. Every time that you see your cell mate, remember that you had a choice and now you are living that choice. You robbed me of something very precious and I will never forgive you for that. Mr. McKinney,I give you life in the memory of one who no longer lives. May you have a long life and may you thank Matthew every day for it."

One can of course understand Dennis McKinney's anguish and fury, but all the same, a boast that a victim's parent, not a jury, can "grant" life is not one that should be heard in any courtroom. The Laramie Boomerang ran a good story by Nate Green on November l0, quoting Billy Ruth Edwards, a Cheyenne attorney and interim director of the [Wyoming] ACLU, as saying that "If, as Dennis Shepard asserted, it was their decision to do everything, to have the trial, to accept the guilty plea of [co-defendant Russell] Henderson... to work it out this way, then we have two people dictating what the state of Wyoming does on behalf of its citizens." The newspaper also cited Jim Angell, executive director of the Wyoming Press Association, as saying that "I don't think any court in the land would stand by an agreement that limits the First Amendment right of an incarcerated, convicted murderer. It's true that McKinney is a less than desirable human being, but he still has the right to speak out to whomever he wants."

In fact it's quite possible that the Wyoming jury, if it had been properly allowed to deliberate the penalty, would have handed McKinney a term less than the consecutive terms decreed by McKinney's parents in consort with prosecutor Cal Rerucha. Bill Dobbs, a gay civil rights attorney in New York who has issued some unsparing criticisms about the pro-death penalty posture of many gay groups on the Shepard case told the Boomerang that the agreement "squelches an entire side of a notorious case. How can we ever learn the truth if we silence somebody? I'm very concerned this could become a pattern". Dobbs added that the Shepards shouldn't have played such a strong part in the prosecution's decisions, that the jury should have been sustained in its right to sentence McKinney and that Shepard's father shouldn't have been able to read a victim's impact statement, especially after the plea bargain had been set. Here at CounterPunch we agree.

Schumer & Forfeiture

Amid all the repugnant features of the "War on Drugs", asset forfeiture often offers us the most outrageous examples of prosecutorial impropriety and vindictiveness. Here's an example. A US customs agent on the Canadian border stopped a newly married couple from California, searched the car and found a marijuana trace. The couple were never charged but the Customs Service seized, and gets to keep, the car and $14,500 in cash. There are thousands upon thousands of such forfeitures. This year cops across America are expected to seize about $449 million in assets.

This summer Rep Henry Hyde won easy passage (375-48) of a reform bill which —we take the estimate from an excellent column by Vin Suprynowicz in the Las Vegas Review-Journal — is "expected to reduce such miscarriages of justice by at least 40 per cent." The key reform concerns the standard of proof required of the cops imposing a forfeiture to "clear and convincing evidence", which is near the "beyond a reasonable doubt" standard required for a guilty verdict in criminal trials. Remember, forfeitures are often exacted without any due process.

But now we find Senator Charles Schumer, who has previously hauled wa-

(**OLS** *continued on page 7*)

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CounterPunch Journeys

What Grapes Have Wrought

Our first CounterPunch Journey found co-editor Jeffrey St Clair in Montana. Here Mark Scaramella guides us through the hectic climax and environmental ravages of the California wine boom, and describes from personal experience how one humble little wine lab produced, from the same vats, a prodigious number of labels.

The 1999 grape harvest in Northern California's wine country is over. Another record year. Driving through Sonoma and Mendocino counties on Highway 101, "The Redwood Highway", one doesn't see many redwoods any more. What one does see are grapes — lots of grapes, thousands of acres of "premium" grapes. Wall-to-wall grapes. And little else. In the spring, there's the occasional Mexican farmworker in a white plastic moonsuit pulling a large spray rig spewing an assortment of toxic chemicals designed to maximize grape and dollars yields. In the fall, teams of very efficient Mexican grape pickers descend on the huge vineyards picking at piece rates that worked out to $6 or $7 per hour.

At last check grape growers were selling premium grapes for over $2,000 a ton. Some top end grapes even get over $3,000 a ton. (Apple growers, by comparison, do well to get $200 a ton these days.) As a result, the area's apple orchards, oak woodlands, grazing and pasture lands are being bulldozed, deep-ripped, fumigated, irrigated, trestled, and vined as rows and columns of industrial grapevines march doubletime to the horizon. Tasting rooms (or roadside booze boutiques, if you're not a wine snob) in faux chateaux dot the landscape, drawing bibbers by the thousands to wine country where they raise their glasses of delicately balanced, blended and clarified chardonnay to the colored light of stained glass windows, take a sniff and swirl a sip. Want a bottle? Only $75. The most expensive California wine, even with the record high cost of grapes, costs no more than about $10 a bottle to make.

What's become of the once-respectable wine industry that I once studied in Fresno, California? The one that spoke of carefully fermented wine, aged in oaken barrels, evoking relaxed European cuisine? The highly palatable and affordable vin ordinaire. In September of 1964 I was nineteen years old. I had just started my junior year at Fresno State, the intellectual center of agriculture for California's central valley. A new course appeared in the Fresno State's 1964 catalog called "Wine Appreciation". Needless to say, it was popular.

Professor Fred Nuri was a recent graduate of UC Davis's well-known wine program established by Maynard Amerine, *eminence grise* of post-prohibition industrial winemaking. Professor Nuri had come to Fresno State to establish an enology program at UC Davis's country-cousin college.

Dr. Amerine wrote "the book" on the subject: "Table Wines: The Technology of Their Production" as well as many others including the seminal assessment of wine-growing regions in California which has grown into a modern-day vineyard plague spreading over California's northern coastal counties. To this day, the UC Davis enology program started by Amerine is the leading authority on industrial wine making in the United States.

It was illegal for most of Dr. Nuri's students actually to drink wine, but that didn't stop us from studying it, learning about the various grape varietals, wines and wine-making techniques. (Of course, illegality didn't stop anyone from drinking off-campus in the mid-60s.)

For my senior Project at Fresno State I developed and prototyped a method of measuring reducing sugars in wine (dextrose and fructose) using infra-red light absorption — as far as we knew it was the first quantitative use of infra-red light. I gave up on the project many times because of seemingly unsolvable problems: no sample cells were available which were not soluble in water (wine); the high infra-red background absorption of water itself; no effective way to narrow the infra-red beam to only the wavelength(s) of interest, etc. After two years of starts and stops, I came up with a crude way of adapting a Beckman Instruments infra-red spectrometer to measure dextrose and fructose with accuracies almost as good as the infrequently used conventional stoichiometric (or hot-titration) method. Surprisingly, the Chemistry department was impressed, even though I had been viewed as a deserter.

I decided not to go through the costly process of applying for a patent. There didn't appear to be more than two or three wine labs in the country that did enough measurements of reducing sugar to justify spending much money on new analytical equipment. So I sold my research papers to the Beckman Company in Palo Alto for $1,500. I found out later that by using a different infrared wavelength and improving on the accuracy, Beckman had begun selling a modified version of my design to measure lactose in milk and was marketing machines to the labs in many creameries in the United States. If I had thought of the milk angle, I might have been getting royalties to this day.

As part of my senior project, I spent some short work-study hours in the labs at Gallo in Modesto and United Vintners outside Stockton as well as at the upscale Ficklin Port family winery outside Madera. Based on this experience and with the help of Professor Nuri, I got a job as a lab technician at Roma Winery in Fresno for the time between graduation and Air Force Officer Training School.

Roma was an old Fresno winery, but the bulk of its output wasn't actually bottled under the name "Roma". It was a contract winery and bottling operation which produced cheap wines made from the high-sugar grapes of California's hot central valley.

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In the nine months I worked in the Roma wine lab I found out that things weren't always what they seemed.

As a lab technician most of my time was spent climbing and walking the catwalks above the large stainless steel and concrete tanks and wooden barrels in Roma's many storage buildings with a sampling stick and a sample bottle caddy. I'd nimbly move from tank to tank dipping the stainless steel stick with a small tube-shaped collector and pouring the sample into a test tube in the caddy, marking down the sample info.

Roma's bottling operation was a byzantine operation both in terms of plumbing and accounting. Vineyards could ask for bottlings from their own grapes, or they could request blends. There were also unrequested blends — when mistakes were made with valve settings.

Roma made three kinds of wines: unfortified still wines, fortified still wines, and sparkling wines. (The word "champagne" can only be used for wine made from grapes from a certain region in France.)

Of the unfortified still wines, Roma made a simple white chablis, a generic red burgundy, and a blended rose.

Cheap fortified wines like muscatel, port and sherry (in which brandy is added to stop the fermentation, leaving unfermented sugar and a sweet taste, along with a higher percentage of alcohol) were popular on the low end of the market.

Cheap sparkling wines were made from the red and white still wines as well.

For example, sherry as it's traditionally made in Spain involves an extremely labor-intensive process both in the double fermentation and in the fancy "solera" aging. So "California Sherry" isn't really sherry at all. It's a cheap imitation sherry made by baking regular white wine with flavorings and charred wood chips. It isn't aged at all, and therefore it's much cheaper than the real Spanish sherry. But it's drinkable nonetheless.

The large facility's plumbing and valves allowed the wine blender to mix our basic wine groups in a variety of ways and call it anything it needed to be called. Sometimes vineyards that asked for their grapes to be fermented, aged and bottled as a batch weren't—for a variety of reasons. Leakage, spillage, bad fermentation, mistake, poor taste or color, poor filtration, expediency, etc. The same bottling set up could be used to produce 15 or 20 runs with different labels on them. The same wine could be sold for various prices under various labels (for marketing considerations), or there might be some slight variations.

The same bottling set up could be used to produce 15 or 20 runs with different labels on them.

As a lab technician, I was in no position to know what went into the bottling machine's intake. Sometimes, the wine was aged after it was bottled for an unknown period, by unknown middle-men, and this might also have accounted for some of the retail price variations. The opportunities for misrepresentation were great.

By this time I'd turned 21 and Roma's wine tasted fine to my unrefined palate. My interest was in the chemistry, not the taste. I've always believed in the principle that if you can't tell the difference, don't pay for it.

Nowadays, the wine industry has pushed itself far into the rarefied air of snob appeal and jacked up their prices with "appellations" and "premium varietals." It's not a good marketing strategy and some wine insiders are starting to wonder how long the industry can keep expanding their labor-exploitative, environmentally degrading vineyard plantations when the snob market isn't expanding very fast. As always, it's mostly a matter of marketing.

In France and Italy ordinary people traditionally consume generic inexpensive red or white wine with meals, not the overhyped expensive stuff that the California wine industry is promoting. In spite of all the talk of "bouquets" and "fruity noses," "hints of cinnamon" and all the "handcrafting" that goes into "fine" wine and so forth, very few people can really tell one wine from the next in blind tastings — unless it's really bad, such as some freshly fermented wines, or those which are on their way to vinegar, or if some foreign yeast found its way into the fermentation...

Can the wine boom last? A wine industry analyst, Lewis Perdue, has taken a look at the large increase in grapevine sales through 1998 (the last year data are available) and calculates that the market for premium wine is limited and much slower than the big increase in grape plantings. When all the new plantings come into production in the next two to three years, the price per ton of grapes will fall and small wineries will feel the pinch. The biggest single cost for a new vineyard is interest on the big loans it takes to buy prime vineyard and develop it with grading, ripping, fumigating, and planting. If these small and medium vineyards have to sell their grapes below cost, they'll soon be pressured to sell out to Big Wine (Gallo, Kendall-Jackson, Mondavi, Beringer, etc.) or to developers, which means even more industrial-scale, outsider-owned vineyards or subdivisions.

The $18 billion a year grossed by the wine industry is small by corporate standards (less than half of Hewlett-Packard's gross alone, for example) and is dominated by the big players who control marketing and technical research to suit themselves, not the little guy growers. So it doesn't have much marketing clout. The industry also faces such marketing obstacles as "neo-prohibitionists" (many states restrict shipments and sales of all alcoholic beverages including wine); monopolistic distributors who control much of the wholesale market; competition from foreign growers who also want to cash in on the current grape prices; anti-alcohol bureaucrats at the ATF and the California Alcoholic Beverage Control Board; hard-to-manage biological pests that can ruin some or all of a vineyard; in-fighting amongst the various segments of the wine business, and even the early stirrings of opposition from labor, neighbors and a few local environmentalists.

The other day a waitress at a Mendocino Coast restaurant went through the motions of formally pouring my father a sample sip from an $18 bottle of wine he reluctantly ordered with dinner. My father, the youngest son of Italian immigrants, born on the Mendocino Coast in 1908, was uncomfortable about being treated so royally in such a modest setting. Laughingly, he stared at the sample sip and asked, "Has anyone ever rejected a bottle of wine after sampling it?" The waitress thought for a moment and replied, "I've been doing this for over 20 years and I think maybe twice." CP

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Democrats Go to Bat for the Stripmining Companies

Old King Coal Still Reigns

It may have been the most revolutionary environmental decision by a federal judge since William Dwyer handed down his first injunction against logging ancient forests in the Pacific Northwest. On October 20, federal judge Charles Haden ruled that stipminers could not bury their mining waste in valleys containing streams that flow year-round or seasonally. The ruling, which was based on provisions in the Clean Water Act, effectively puts a halt to the latest form of coal mining: mountain-top removal, which makes stripmining look like laser-eye surgery by comparison. In this technique, mountains are simply decapitated, the coal extracted and the waste dumped in the nearest valley. Since 1986 more than 470 miles of West Virginia streams have been buried in these "valley fills".

In a plainspoken and tough 48-page ruling, Haden wrote: "When valley fills are permitted in intermittent and perennial streams, they destroy those stream segments. The normal flow and gradient of the stream is now buried under millions of cubic yards of excess spoil waste material, an extremely adverse effect. If there are fish, they cannot migrate. If there is any life form that cannot acclimate to life deep in a rubble pile, it is eliminated. No effect on related environmental values is more adverse than obliteration. Under a valley fill, the water quality of the stream becomes zero. Because there is no stream, there is no water quality." The suit was brought by one of the most tenacious groups in the nation, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy.

Senator Robert Byrd, the coal mining companies' best friend on the Hill, found the judge's ruling irksome. The senator threw a tantrum on the floor of the Senate and vowed to pin a rider to the Interior bill overturning the judge Haden's injunction. Byrd was backed in this hardball tactic by Sen. Jay Rockefeller, Rep. Nick Rahall and Gov. Cecil Underwood—all Democrats. Underwood's rhetoric was especially heated as he urged Byrd on. "I don't see how you can mine any coal if Haden's decision is upheld", Underwood fumed. "Carried to the extreme, it would virtually shut us down. It will take statutory correction to change it permanently. If the law is changed, the court decision is moot."

Rahall, a vocal critic of gold and silver mining practices in the western states, also attacked Haden's ruling, saying it put West Virginia at competitive disadvantage. "There's some urgency in addressing this issue," said Rahall. "What this decision does, then, is undermine one of the basic tenets of the Surface Mining Act, which was to provide a level regulatory playing field among all the states."

"What can be more ironic?" says Jim Sconyners, a mining organizer with the WV chapter of the Sierra Club. "From mining reformer to defender of the worst mining abuses in America. The transformation is breathtaking."

Byrd made calls to George Frampton, head of the Council on Environmental Quality, and the White House and on October 29 Clinton sent word to Byrd that he supported the senator's measure to bail out the coal mining companies and keep tearing apart the mountains in the coal mining states of West Virginia, Kentucky, and, yes, Tennessee.

Kathy Karpan, the head of the Office of Surface Mining (a part of Bruce Babbitt's Interior Department), was quick to leap to the mining industry's defense. Within hours of Haden's ruling, Karpen told the Martinsville Daily Mail that she was willing to change the regulations so that they could get around the judge's order and resume blasting the tops off mountains and burying the mining waste in streams. But she noted that other agencies would have to join hers in the effort. "That is on the table, whether the stream buffer zones can stand," Karpan said. "What complicates this is, it's not just an issue for our agency. We have to talk to the EPA and the Corps of Engineers."

Karpan need not worry. On the issue of coal mining, the Clinton administration has put up a united front, in part owing to Al Gore's longstanding ties to the strip miners. The big coal companies have indeed prospered in West Virginia during the Clinton years. Jim Truman, a coal market analyst for Hill and Associates, a management consulting firm in Annapolis, Maryland, reports that the state's coal production has increased by 30 million tons since 1992. Moreover, the coal industry has rapidly consolidated. In 1995, the eleven largest companies in the Appalachian coal region (West Virginia, Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee) produced less than half the coal, with the largest company excavating 25 million tons a year. Just three years later, the top 11 companies produced more than 70 percent of the region's coal, with the three biggest firms hauling out more than 40 million tons each. The frenzy of stripmining has depleted the region's coal reserves, according to Truman. He estimates that at current rates West Virginia's coal supply will be exhausted in about 25 years.

Members of the Citizens Coal Council, an anti-strip mining coalition, went to Washington to air their concerns to George Frampton. They asked Frampton (Gore's top environmental adviser) why the administration would consider signing the Byrd rider when it had pledged to veto all anti-environmental measures attached to year-end funding bills. Frampton was blunt. He said simply, "We don't consider this an environmental issue." As one of the enviros at the meeting said, "If Clinton and Gore don't consider stripmining an environmental issue, what the hell is?"

Joe Lovett, the Charleston lawyer who argued the case for the Highlands Conservancy, thinks Clinton and Gore will never cross Byrd. "The White House is hedging," Lovett said. "Byrd's rider is a blatant attempt to remove the most important stream protection provisions from the Clean Water Act and the Surface Mining Act. But my guess is that Clinton's not going to veto it."

So much for the man recently described as the greatest environmental president since Teddy Roosevelt. CP

"If Clinton and Gore don't consider strip mining an environmental issue, what the hell is?"

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ter for the Department of Justice on this issue, conspiring with another certified liberal, Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont, to sabotage the Hyde bill.Schumer and Leahy want to substitute the phrase "the preponderance of the evidence", as the requirement linking seized assets to a criminal. This is much weaker than "clear and convincing evidence". Schumer's bill would also axe other excellent features of Hyde's legislation, which eliminated the insanely expensive claim provisions exacted on those trying to get back their seized property. And yes, this flower of liberalism is also trying to nix the Hyde bill's provision of court-appointed counsel to represent those forefeiture victims to poor to afford a lawyer.

Schumer has the effrontery to claim that his bill permits reform in forfeiture laws "without throwing the baby out with the bathwater". Calling all CounterPunchers! Pick up the phone and let this police-state liberal know what you think of his stinking bit of whoredom for the Justice Department. As Suprynowicz—a regular columnist on libertarian issues for the Review-Journal—writes, "The Hyde bill doesn't solve the entire problem, but it's a big step in the right direction. This effort to rein in police excesses — 'short-cut' fines more reminiscent of police state bullies extorting the wealth of helpless racial minorities at Third World border crossings — should be embraced and applauded, rather than watered down."

We last encountered Schumer proposing the creation of a "terrorism czar", who would presumably sit next to the White House drug czar, eroding those few constitutional protections that remain to us.For a foretaste of things to come glance at the website of the London police — cityoflondon.gov.uk — wghich currently features photographs of suspects in the "Carnival against Capitalism" held in the City last July, causing a fair amount of damage by some among the crowd of 6,000 to the International Futures Exchange building. These internet "most wanted" lists will become increasingly common. Peter Werbe, a Fifth Estate anarchist in Detroit says that this is how East Lansing cops identified people after a ruckus there last year. The trend will no doubt prompt increasing use of masks, an interesting millennial development somewhat presaged by Roger Caillois in his book Man, Play and Games, published in English in 1961:

"In a police state the uniform replaces the mask of a vertiginous society. The uniform is almost the exact opposite of the mask, and always symbolizes a type of authority founded on entirely opppsing principles. The mask is aimed to dissimulate and terrify. It signified the eruption of a fearful, capricious, intermittent and inordinate power which emerged to evoke pious terror in the profane masses and to punish them for their imprudence and their faults. The uniform is also a disguise, but it is official, permanent, regulated and above all leaves the face exposed. It makes the individual a representative and a servant of an impartial and immutable rule, rather than the delirious prey of contagious vehemence."

Aux Naturale?

One of our favorite places is Breitenbush Hot Springs, a primitive resort run by hippies of an older vintage in the ancient forests of the Cascade Mountains about sixty miles east of Salem, Oregon. Every year Breitenbush hosts a Hallowe'en party. This year the guests included Ken Kesey, who drove his bus Further to the event, Ken Babbs (one of Kesey's fellow pranksters), Carolyn Garcia (Jerry's former wife, also know as Mountain Girl) and Andrew Weil, author of the Natural Mind and the best-selling Natural Health, Natural Medicine. Breitenbush is the home of one of the finest organic kitchens on the West Coast and for the party chefs had been invited from across the country to cook up a variety of wild mushrooms. Other vegetarian delights were laid out for the feast.

But when we stepped out on the lodge's back porch for a look at the river, we spied none other than Natural Man/Mind Weil, sitting by himself, a pizza box on his lap, a slice of greasy pizza in his hands. The holistic health guru had the pizza delivered from Salem. We remember the days, back in Vermont, when the hairy Weil would show up at Tree Frog farm—home of our dear, departed friend Andrew Kopkind—strip, and stand on his head naked until Andrew, would beg him to desist.

Discordant Harmony

Remember all the talk back in 1993 about how NAFTA was going to lift Mexico out of poverty? By almost every measure the situation south of the border has gotten worse. CounterPunch just got its hands on a report by the Mexican government's National Statistical Institute. According to the Institute's Urban Employment Survey, more than 46 percent of Mexican workers make less than 64 pesos a day, about six dollars. And 12 percent of Mexican workers make less than 32 pesos per day, or three dollars. In additions, less than half of those employed receive any kind of benefits.

Good Question

Dear Alex and Jeff: Is Hitchens following the route of Horowitz and Gitlin or is my command of the English language failing me? In the Sept. 24,1999 TLS, Hitchens reviews Chomsky's The Umbrella of U.S.Power. Here is what he says: "This need not mean that there cannot be a single standard, nor—as he (Chomsky) sometimes seems to argue- that the US government is ex hypothesi incapable of being a moral agent.One can hardly argue that the belated reckoning with the former favourite Slobodan Milosevic arose out of a desire for markets."

So, according to Hitchens, the US government (or any government for that matter) CAN be a moral agent and as proof he offers the slaughter of Yugoslavia. Did I understand correctly?

Warm regards, Aris CP

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double doors slammed behind me (just like in the movies). But I was very nervous about the class. To do a bad job here was just unthinkable. It is not a credit class. The government took away Pell Grants (financial aid) from the prisoners, and so they cannot afford to attend college. When this happened, the University of Pittsburgh, under further pressure from the state of Pennsylvania, closed the degree program it once had there. My friend did not want to see all nonvocational programs end at the prison, so she and another person started a noncredit certificate program. So far, it has been a great success.

In my first class, I had the students sign the roster sheet and asked them to put down, in addition to their given names, any name they preferred me to use. Some wrote down Muslim names, one an Egyptian name, and some nicknames. So I have Khalifa, Senifer, Heru, Farid Rafiq, Bamoni, Crump, Capone, and Muscles as well as Charlie and Deion. They range in age from early 20s to late 40s. I do not know why they are in prison. All but one of the students are black (I am white), and it struck me right away that none of the black students is light-skinned. They do not look like the African American newscasters we see now on television. Not only do black Americans face an abominable discrimination that puts so many in prison but also those with the darkest skin color face this discrimination most forcefully.

I began the first class by saying something about myself. A student interrupted me and asked if any of my college students had gone on to become CEOs! I replied that I had a former student who was now a very rich bond broker on Wall Street but I did not know whether to be proud of this or not. Then I passed out some handouts. I started to talk about capitalism and what I thought were its main features. Then I asked a question about wealth and the discussion

The class ended with me pounding on the table, saying "Accumulate, accumulate, that is Moses and the Prophets."

began. I can only describe it as a runaway train. We talked about many things, for at least an hour without a stop. Some comments were as sharp as any I have ever heard from a student some were funny, and some reflected views common on the outside. But all were made seriously, by men wanting to know and wanting to have their voices heard. I was exhilarated in a way seldom so in my regular classes. When I got home I slept fitfully. I kept thinking about the class and I kept seeing the students' faces. I dreamed about them most of the night.

The next class was just like the first. We discussed an article called "Buddhist Economics" by E. F. Schumacher, from his book, Small is Beautiful, and compared the Buddhist concept of Right Livelihood with work and consumption in capitalism. This time we went on for an hour and a half. Then I took a break, but they were right back in their seats in a few minutes.

I gave a brief lecture about the accumulation of capital. I had Marx's famous letter scheme, M-C-C'-M', on the chalkboard, and I explained what each letter meant while they wrote furiously on their notepads. The class ended with me pounding on the table, saying "Accumulate, accumulate, that is Moses and the Prophets." I had their complete and undivided attention when I said this and then argued that capital will be accumulated whatever the cost, whether it is enslavement, theft, or murder.

During this class, I felt something I have never felt in a class before. I know that this may sound naive to some of you, but I felt sitting there with convicts all around me, that we really were brothers. We left the class together after the whistle shrilly blew the signal that they had to return to their cellblocks. We walked down the steps of the classroom building and out into the yard among the general prison population. I looked up at the stars and my heart was filled with a hard sadness. CP

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How Andrew Weil Shocked Ken Kesey

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